

Message Text

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51

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 OMB-01 AID-05 CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-05

NSAE-00 PA-01 RSC-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 CU-02 NIC-01

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R 091020Z DEC 74

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8959

CONFIDENTIAL BANGKOK 19239

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, TH

SUBJECT: MONKS AND POLITICS

REF: A) BANGKOK 19138; B) FBIS DO90230 DEC 74

1. IN HIS ONLY PUBLIC STATEMENT THUS FAR ON THE THAI BUDDHIST MONKS' PARTICIPATION IN THE 18-30 NOVEMBER FARMERS' RALLY, GENERAL KRIT SIWARA SAID "THIS IS THE END OF EVERY-THING... THERE IS NOTHING MORE SERIOUS THAN THIS." (REF A). THE STATEMENT PROBABLY REFLECTS THE FEELING OF THE MAJORITY OF THAILAND'S CONSERVATIVE ELITE.

2. DURING A LUNCHEON ENGAGEMENT WITH AN EMBASSY POLITICAL OFFICER ON DECEMBER 4, TWO LECTURERS IN POLITICAL SCIENCE AT CHULALONGKON UNIVERSITY, EXPRESSED DEEP CONCERN ABOUT KRIT'S REMARK. THEY BELIEVE IT REFLECTS A MISINTERPRETATION OF THE NATURE OF THE MONKS' INVOLVEMENT WITH PROTESTING FARMERS AND STUDENTS. SUGGESTING THAT THIS ACTION IS THE BEGINNING OF THE FALL OF THAI BUDDHISM IS, IN THEIR VIEW, AN OVERREACTION THAT COULD RESULT IN A FEELING AMONG THE ELITE THAT "THINGS HAVE GONE FAR ENOUGH. THE MILITARY MUST RETURN AND RESTORE ORDER."

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3. ONE OF THE LECTURES SUBSEQUENTLY WROTE A COLUMN

(REF B) APPEARING IN THE BANGKOK POST DECEMBER 9. IT IS A MESSAGE TO THE THAI CONSERVATIVE ELITE. A KEY EARLY PARAGRAPH SAYS "IT IS COMMON PRACTICE FOR COUNTRY PEOPLE TO GO AND SEEK ADVICE FROM THE MONKS ON QUITE WORLDLY AFFAIRS. THERE HAVE CERTAINLY BEEN CASES WHERE MONKS HAVE TAKEN PART IN DEMANDING A CHANGE IN GOVERNMENTAL DECISIONS, SUCH AS THE DECISION TO BUILD A ROAD." THE COLUMNIST ADDRESSES THE LAST PARAGRAPH, WHICH POINTS UP THE BENEFICIAL POLITICAL ROLE MONKS CAN PLAY, DIRECTLY TO KRIT. MASTERS

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